The Divine Disturbance
Acts 2:1-13
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John M. Buchanan
Broad Street Presbyterian Church
Columbus, Ohio

"What is the wind?", a little boy asked his grandfather, a wise and hardy sailor. "I don't know, my boy," answered the old man, "but I can hoist a sail."

So it is with Christians and the Spirit of God. Unable to define it, categorize it, even comprehend it, the Holy Spirit is an experience felt and known more by its results than by the conclusions of deductive logic. In fact, the Hebrew word for spirit may be translated breath or wind. And when we attempt to talk rationally about the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of God, we must borrow symbols, metaphors, or like the old sailor, simply bear witness to observable results.

* to put into words intimate, personal experiences

It is often difficult to talk experientially. Has anything ever happened in your life that touched you very deeply: something about which you could say, "this is important: this is a rare and beautiful moment of truth?" Of course it has happened to all of us, and we know what it means to be unable to communicate the essence of that experience to anyone else. - It was ours - personally - intimately

When I talk with friends from out of town or out of state, and the conversation focuses on life in Columbus, Ohio, sooner or later we get around to ~~something~~ what happens here on Saturday afternoons in the fall. I tell them about eighty thousand people, and the band making a dramatic entrance*: about Physicians, lawyers, sedate business men/and proper matrons, clapping and stomping their feet and embracing and suffering, sharing an experience of intense communal hope and ecstacy. But my explanations, regardless of their eloquence, never really convey the essence of the experience. You have to be there. In fact, to try to reduce that

* and the mounting waves of enthusiasm:

experience to ideas and words is to risk sounding strange, unreal or worse to the uninitiated.

That, I would submit, is the dilemma of Pentecost. It is an important event in the life of the Church: known as the birthday of the Church. But we don't know what to do with it today, partly because you had to have been there.

Weeks had gone by since the crucifixion and resurrection appearances of Jesus Christ. The disciples and other followers of Jesus were still in Jerusalem, waiting. I can imagine them spending a lot of time talking about what to do next, making plans about the right time and right place to begin the work they knew thay had to do. But always there were sound reasons to wait a little longer. The dead weight of inertia was beginning to take its toll. And then, Pentecost, the great Jewish festival, and the city began to fill with pilgrims as it had for Passover. They were there too, mingling with the crowds: and suddenly the moment they had been waiting for arrived. Simon Peter was certainly no orator: but during the morning of Pentecost something came over Peter - and to all who would listen he fairly shouted an articulate and unmistakably clear testimony to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The people who heard it were moved and responded. The other disciples somehow shared the experience: Men of all nations and races sensed themselves drawn together and able to communicate with each other in a way that transcended all the old animosities and divisions. And later when Luke wrote it down he described it in rich symbolism: "the rush of a mighty wind, tongues as of fire."

(*) it was such an unlikely experience that those who witnessed it thought that the disciples were intoxicated - even this - 9.00 AM

As the Church looks back on its history it has always pointed to that experience as the beginning because of two things which happened, both of

them new. First, the early Christians sensed on Pentecost that God himself was drawing them together in a unique relationship that transcended the normal cultural barriers of class, race, nationality and language. On Pentecost they sensed that they were indeed one in Christ, one body. Second, the early Christians sensed that the same Spirit that was drawing them together on Pentecost was pushing and prodding them corporately out into the world. That is the essence of Pentecost: a divine disturbance that pulled together a group of unrelated people and after it had made them into a new community of faith pushed them out into the rough and brutal world of the first century in the name of Jesus Christ. Their testimony, expressed in the symbols of wind and fire is that the power behind this experience came from outside. It was not something they conjured up or generated themselves. It literally happened to them. They called that power Holy Spirit: the same spirit which, in the Old Testament is the energy - the vitalizing, life-giving presence of God. The same breath that God breathed into man in the beginning: the same fire through which God confronted Moses in the desert. It was not a philosophic proposition for them: it was a fact of experience.

We have difficulty with the idea. Let us admit it. We Presbyterians experience severe discomfort whenever we stray very far from our cerebral perception of the Gospel. The story is told of a Presbyterian congregation in worship, very traditional, staid, dignified. A man strayed into the service, took a seat in the back pew and began to respond to the minister's statements with a series of increasingly audible "Amens." Finally, an usher approached him and asked if there were anything wrong. "Why no," the man said, "I've got the spirit": to which the usher responded, "Well, I hope you didn't ~~get~~ catch it here."

We are not very comfortable with feelings and religious experiences.

We are not comfortable laughing or crying in Church. When we sing our great hymns of joy and praise it sounds for all the world as if we have gathered for communal mourning.

Part of the reason is our negative reaction to the excesses of Pentecostalism: we will not and should not suspend our rational faculties in order to create another Pentecost experience everytime we are together.

Both approaches - the induced passion of neo - pentecostalism, and the ice cold veneer of too much Presbyterianism - miss, I believe, the importance of Pentecost. Both miss the fact that the Church of Jesus Christ is a drawing together of God's people in a new community of understanding and forgiveness and love; and a moving out of that same community into the world in the name of Jesus Christ - to be to the world what he was: a light in the darkness, a bearer of hope, a healer of wounds, a feeder of the hungry, a liberator of the oppressed.

My assumption is that the Holy Spirit is present in the Church: that the presence of the Spirit is no more debatable than is the presence of the sun in the sky. My assumption is that it makes no sense whatever to try to prove the Spirit, but - as is the case with the wind - simply hoist a sail and watch it fill and billow and propell. My assumption is that the Spirit of God is working whenever we feel ourselves drawn together - in conversation - in prayer - over coffee - even in a committee meeting. My assumption is that the Spirit of God is at work when people reach out to each other in kindness and sympathy. And my assumption is that it is the Spirit of God that makes us impatient with an imperfect world; that makes us weep at man's inhumanity to man, that makes us burn with anger at injustice and oppression. My assumption is that God's spirit keeps pushing the Church into new and sometimes difficult avenues of mission. Pentecost was a very disturbing day. It brought

together men and women who had nothing in common. And it sent them into the world to do things they wouldn't have imagined they would be doing. But it meant one thing more. The Pentecost experience indicated that God is the power behind the Church.

Elton Trueblood, the great Quaker theologian, has written that the major heresy of the Comtemporary Church is that we no longer seem to believe that our effort will succeed. (See The Incendiary Fellowship, p 111) That is to say, we lose our vision and settle for the mediocre: we lose our hope and settle for making the budget.

Our Lord had in mind the transformation of the entire human enterprise. He had in mind a new humanity - free, forgiven, forgiving, joyful, reconciled with God and man. And he had in mind that his Church would be the model, show the way, demonstrate a new reality for all the nations - a new and better way of peace and love and hope.

The world, I would submit, needs that rather desparately today - this day. That is the vision that opens up on Pentecost.

So let us come to the table together, prepared to be disturbed; prepared to be drawn together and then sent out with new faith, new courage, new hope. Let us come to table singing - with some feeling

Spirit of God, Descend upon my heart
I ask no dream, no prophet ecstacies,
No sudden rending of the veil of clay,
No angel visitant, no opening skies;
But take the dimness of my soul away." Amen

Father, we are grateful for the moving of your spirit in the Church across the centuries. As we come to your table this morning, may we be alive to that same spirit in our midst. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

offery 9:00

We are a community of faith. It is appropriate that as we come to the table of our Lord Jesus Christ, that we recall those members of our community who died since last we broke bread together.

~~MEMORIAL SERVICE~~

St. Paul wrote:

I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels, nor Principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

So in the assurance of God's continuing love for them, and in gratitude for their lives, we remember those of our number who have died:

Forrest W. Sutton who joined the Church on January 8, 1939 and died March 21, 1975

Katherine A. Van Fossen March 19, 1911 April 25, 1975

Since →

LET US PRAY: (unison)

O God: you have designed this wonderful world and know all things good for us. Give us such faith that, by day and by night, in all times and all places, we may without fear trust those who are dear to us to your never-failing love, in this life and in the life to come; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

CHOIR: For all the Saints - one stanza